

10 May 1951

Marie Kirkwood
In Charge of Publicity

In its exhibition, Near Eastern Embroideries, The Cleveland Museum of Art presents 62 items from North Africa, Morocco, Algiers, Turkey and from the Isles of Greece. It will be on view throughout the summer.

This exhibition presents a beautiful art no longer produced, and a simple manner of living now lost, according to Evelyn Svec, Assistant in Textiles in the Museum, who assembled the material from the Cleveland Museum's own collections. Most of the pieces are gifts from the late Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Wade, founder of the museum, with other gifts of Mrs. John W. Seaver, Mrs. Morris A. Black, Mrs. Chester C. Bolton, Mrs. Charles W. Wason, Ellen Luck and Charles F. Ickle.

Miss Svec adds that until 1900, for uncounted centuries, the women and girls of Greece were embroiderers. With the beginning of our century the wonders of modern machine embroidery were brought home to them and they stopped embroidering. A piece of partial counter-luck was that at just that time a wave of art dealers "discovered" the Greek embroideries and bought most of them. Unfortunately when they put them on the market, they were cut up to make them go farther, and most of these specimens are but fragments. The ~~Get~~ Cleveland show does ~~centi~~ contain one rare, whole piece, a bed cover.

The pieces are parts of towels, sleeves, skirts, panels, valances, bed curtains, pillows and even bed-tents.

The whole life of the Greek maiden must have been dedicated to her embroideries. She was taught the first stitches as soon as her little hands became firm enough to hold a needle, threaded with home spun linen or silk with which she decorated the linen or silk which had been grown on her parents own land. If a girl hadn't embroidered an extensive enough trousseau by the time she was ready to be married her mother and sisters gave from their hordes, so that sometimes a family would beggar itself to start the oldest daughter out right.

Embroidery was also important not only because it furnished such an outlet for expression to the women but because it was the principal decoration in what would otherwise have been a pretty bare life. The people were ~~poor~~ poor. The life was simple to the extent that a home was usually a one-room shelter. But these beautiful embroideries which literally covered everything in the house and the costumes of the people, made it beautiful.

Colors are rich and muted, especially a peculiar violet, the secret of which is lost. All sorts of stitches were used, darning, satin, cross, and feather. Designs are elaborate arabesques, suggesting Islamic influence, fruit, flowers and abstractions. One of the loveliest is a ~~pe~~ pillow from Crete, sirens and birds in red, blue and yellow.